

Qualitative Research Methods for China Studies



Intensive course, Zhejiang University



General outline

This course provides an introduction to ethnographic methods and practical experience with a small field study, where the exercises completed during this week will form the basis for an exam paper. The course will cover key aspects of qualitative research, such as formulating a research problem, research questions, methodological choices, analysis, ethical concerns and presentation of findings. Readings and teacher presentations will be combined with practical exercises, with emphasis on the latter. Mode of teaching will combine class presentations, plenary discussions, group work, instruction and experience-sharing. During the period of the course, students will concurrently develop their independent projects that will form the basis for exam papers. All literature must be read in preparation for the course. It is expected that the students will collaborate during common exercises during the course. The course stresses hands-on activities and learning-by-doing. Therefore, there will be many practical exercises and much homework during the course. This will not leave time to read between classes, so all literature must be read beforehand. The empirical theme of the course is the daily life of retired people in Hangzhou with

a focus on intergenerational relationships.

The course is planned as a one-week intensive course for Scandinavian MA students in China Studies, and counts as a total of 5 ECTS (135 hours). It will take place at a Chinese university campus and will be co-taught by one teacher from the Chinese university and one teacher from a Scandinavian university. The languages of instruction will be Chinese and English.

Prerequisites

It is assumed that students:

- Read and speak Modern Standard Chinese (Putonghua) at a level corresponding to the requirements for a BA degree in China Studies at a Scandinavian university
- Have comprehensive knowledge of Chinese culture and society
- Have a basic knowledge of qualitative research methods

Aims of the course

The main aims of the course are:

- that students learn to design a China-related research project based on qualitative methods.
- that students gain practical experience in qualitative research methods, primarily observations and interviews.
- that students achieve a basic understanding of intergenerational relationships in urban Chinese families.

To achieve these aims the course will include:

- discussions of the potential and limitations of qualitative research methods.
- planning, conducting and reflecting critically on an observation.
- planning, conducting, transcribing and reflecting critically on interviews.
- reading academic texts in Chinese and English, as well as mass and social media texts in Chinese about the research theme.

Course outline

Time	Theme/Title	Material
Day One		
Morning session	<p><i>Welcome and Presentation</i></p> <p>Aims and structure of the course</p> <p>Discussion: Students' earlier experiences with using qualitative methods in China Studies.</p> <p><i>Lecture: Presentation of the selected theme and discussion of possible sub-themes and perspectives.</i></p>	<p>Croll, 2006. Whyte, 2005. Chen, Yu, Allan Hicks and Alison E. While, 2014.</p>
Lunch break		
Afternoon session	<p><i>Lecture: The role of mass media and social media texts in the design of a research project.</i></p> <p> Exercise: Analyse Chinese social and mass media texts with the purpose of identifying relevant perspectives and building vocabulary related to the selected theme. Start a joint list of relevant Chinese key terms related to the theme. This list can be used later in the preparation of the interviews.</p>	<p>秦悦, 2013. 宗自贡, 2005. 祝乃娟, 2012. 田波澜, 2014. 田波澜, 2013.</p>
Day Two		
Morning session	<p><i>Lecture: An introduction to qualitative research methods</i> (observation, participant observation, interview, focus groups, case studies).</p> <p><i>Lecture: Doing fieldwork in China: Political constraints.</i> The main aim of this session is to reflect on the specific Chinese context of the fieldwork situation.</p>	<p>Eriksen, 2010. Code of Ethics of the AAA, 2012. Yin, 2009. Bryman, 2012. Hansen, 2006. Holz, 2007. Göbel, 2014.</p>
Lunch break		
Afternoon session	<p><i>Exercise: Role play: getting access to the field.</i> The aim of this exercise is to reflect on the positionality of different actors in the fieldwork situation. Focus will be on the gatekeeper function and on individual and institutional interests.</p> <p><i>Lecture: How to make use of Chinese academic journals in a research project.</i></p>	<p>鄧玉玲, 2014.</p>

Time	Theme/Title	Material
	 <p>Exercise: identify Chinese academic articles relevant to the selected theme through <i>China Academic Journals</i> and other relevant databases. Add new entries to the list of key terms, this time with a focus on the academic vocabulary.</p>	

Day Three		
Morning session	<p>Lecture: Interviews as (intercultural) communication.</p> <p>Lecture and exercise: <i>Analysis of interviews: Challenges and strategies.</i></p>	<p>Kvale, Steinar & Brinkmann, 2009. Bernard, 2011. O'Brien, 2006. Transcript of interview with student (in Chinese).</p>
	Lunch break	
Afternoon session	 <p>Exercise: Observation. Students will form teams of two and go out to observe a social situation where retired/elderly people are involved. The students may decide a particular focus, take notes, and compare observations. Each team prepares a short presentation based on the observations.</p>	<p>Spradley, 1980.</p>

Day Four		
Morning session	<p>Presentations:</p> <p>Students will present the main methodological issues that came out of their observations from the day before.</p> <p>Exercise: Each team designs an <i>interview guide</i> for an exploratory semi-structured interview focusing on elderly people's intergenerational relationships.</p>	
	Lunch break	
Afternoon session	<p>Exercise: Each team carries out two <i>semi-structured interviews</i> based on the interview guide. One student conducts the interview while the other takes notes. The students will change roles in the second interview. All interviews are audiotaped.</p>	

	Exercise: Students will <i>transcribe</i> (at least part of) their interviews and analyse interview data to prepare for presentations on day five.	
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Day Five		
Morning session	<p>Presentations: Each team gives a 20-minute presentation in which students reflect upon their readings, observations and interviews from two perspectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Methodological reflections - Reflections on elderly people's intergenerational relationships 	
	Lunch break	
Afternoon session	<p>Workshop: Each team designs a research project based on texts, observations and interviews. These projects are later discussed in plenum. At the end of the workshop each team is expected to have an outline of the paper the students will later hand in.</p> <p>Wrap up and evaluation of the course.</p>	

Learning activities

The course combines lectures, seminars and group discussions held in English and Chinese with a field trip. Students will be given assignments to prepare before each respective class session. Based on the course and the field trip, the students are required to give a presentation with ideas for a final paper on the last day of the course and to hand in a final paper at a later date via email. Attendance is compulsory according to the regulations of the Chinese university and students are expected to come to classes well prepared. Students will receive the list of readings about one month before the course starts and are expected to have read at least the mandatory texts before the beginning of the course.

Course requirements/ examination

The students' performance during the course, including active class attendance, written assignments, and the final paper, count towards the final grade for the course. Exam papers must be written in groups (12-15 pages including references and notes) and should discuss one aspect of the selected theme and reflect upon the applied methodology. The paper has to include: a) an introduction presenting the research question; b) a presentation of the methodology used for collecting data; c) reflections on methodological challenges in the project; d) a discussion of the results of the investigation; e) a conclusion; and f) a list of references that include at least five academic sources that are used in the paper. Only papers including *all of these points* will be able to pass, and papers will be graded passed/not passed.

Course Material

Bernard, H. Russell (2011). "Interviewing I: Unstructured and Semistructured", in *Research Methods in Anthropology* (5th Edition). Blue Ridge Summit, PA, USA: AltaMira, 2011, pp. 156-186.

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Tian Bolan 田波澜, "人民公园相亲角的社会学解读" *东方早报*, 2013年1月24日

Whyte, M. (2005). Continuity and change in urban Chinese family life. *The China Journal*, 53, 9-33.

Yin, Robert K. (2009) "How to Know Whether and When to Use Case Studies as a Research Method", in *Case Study Research. Design and Methods*. Fourth edition, Los Angeles: Sage, 1-23.

Zhi Yuling 鄧玉玲 (2014) "被征地老人的家庭代际关系研究 —— 基于杭州市调查", *社会工作* 2014年第4期, pp. 135-142.

Zhu Naijuan 祝乃娟, "公共政策应该为‘啃老’负责。立法防止‘啃老’令人费解", *21世纪经济报道*, 2012年3月13日

Zong Zigong 宗自贡, "'啃老族': 要么经济难独立, 要么精神上难'断奶' "。 *新华每日电讯* 2005年11月12日